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Treasures of American History Featured in Princeton Exhibition

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Treasures of American History Featured in Princeton Exhibition

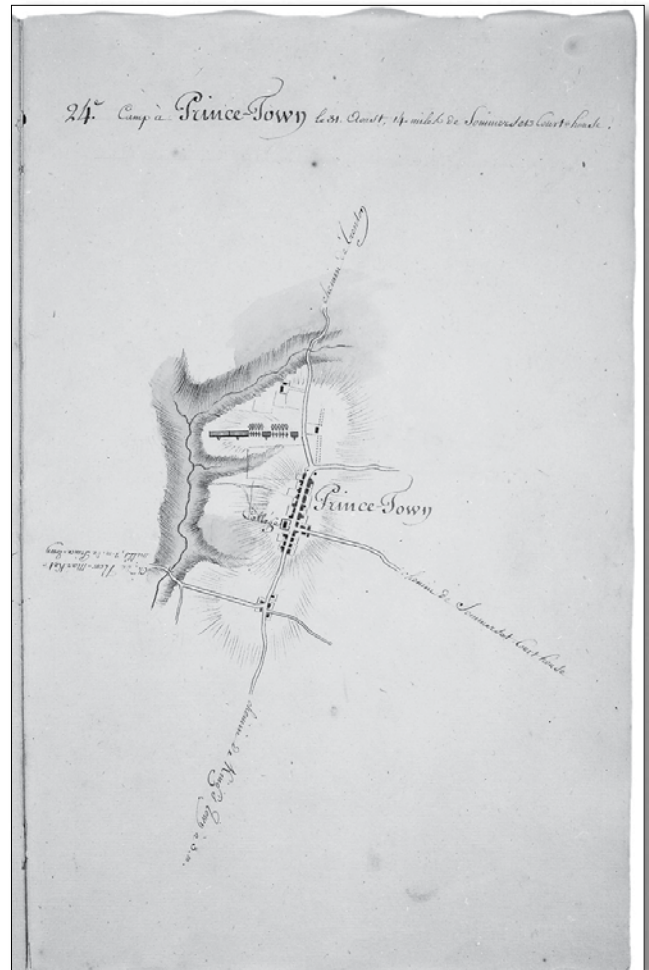
By Emily Aronson, Princeton University

From a firsthand account of colonial life in Jamestown to a wanted poster for John Wilkes Booth following President Abraham Lincoln's assassination, a Princeton University Library exhibition, which opened February 22, traces the American experience from 1607 to 1865. Several items from Princeton's collections are on display for the first time. *A Republic in the Wilderness: Treasures of American History from Jamestown to Appomattox* features nearly a hundred of the library's finest holdings of American historical manuscripts, autograph letters, rare books, maps, photographs, and other materials from the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) and Scheide Library. Having debuted on George Washington's birthday, the free exhibition is open to the public in Firestone Library's main gallery through August.

“The exhibition represents the growth of the American nation, from European colonization to the American Revolution, and from westward expansion to the end of the Civil War, against the background of an evolving natural and man-made environment,” Curator of Manuscripts Don Skemer says. “It bears witness to the diverse peoples



A poster dated April 20, 1865, advertises a reward for the capture of John Wilkes Booth and other conspirators for the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln.



Louis-Alexandre Berthier prepared more than a hundred maps during the Revolutionary War. Here is Berthier's 1781 map of the town of Princeton, with the "College" (now Princeton University) labeled in the center.

and defining events that helped shape America and created an enduring political union.”

Assistant Curator of Manuscripts Anna Chen says it took more than a year to select items from the thousands of collections in the RBSC and Scheide Library holdings. Some items, such as the wanted poster for Lincoln's murderer, were discovered hidden among other artifacts stored in the library. "We have a wonderful and deep American historical collection, but it's rarely exhibited because there is just so much from which to choose," Skemer says.

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OTHER NEWS—Continued
Jennie Thomas, Editor

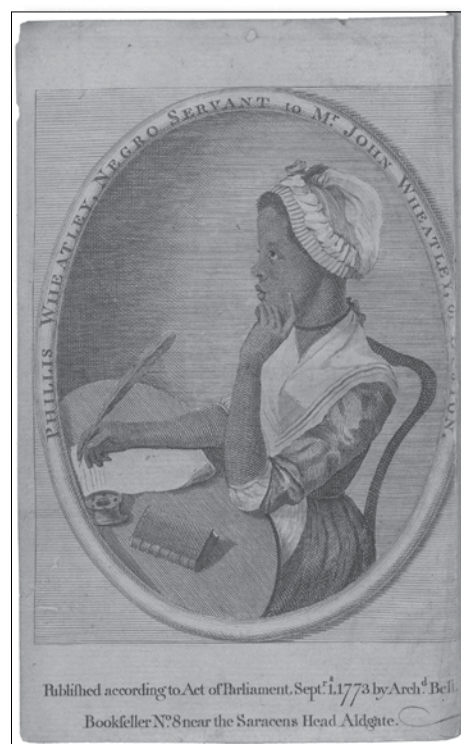
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Notable items in the exhibition include

- The English writer William Strachey's 1612 account of the early American settlement in Jamestown, Virginia;
- George Washington's land surveys;
- John Trumbull's final sketch for his painting of the Battle of Princeton;
- Leaves from Thomas Jefferson's *Farm Book*;
- A letter on slavery by abolitionist movement leader Frederick Douglass;
- Abraham Lincoln's manuscript draft of a speech on sectionalism; and
- General George McClellan's collection of Civil War photographs.

The exhibition's title, *A Republic in the Wilderness*, comes from American historian George Bancroft's 1866 writings. In summarizing the previous 250 years, Bancroft said: "In the fullness of time a republic rose up in the wilderness of America."

"One of the themes that connects the pieces in the show is the importance of the land and the environment to America's understanding of itself and the many cultures it comprises," explains Chen, citing examples such as a 17th-century land deed of New Jersey signed by English



*An illustration of Phillis Wheatley featured in her 1773 book *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*. Wheatley was the first African American woman to publish a book of poetry in English.*

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settlers and Lenape Indians, and views of landscapes and wildlife by artists George Catlin and John James Audubon.

The exhibition also tells the stories of African Americans brought to the country as slaves, including a broadside diagram of a slave ship, and of the encounters between Native Americans and European settlers as the country grew.

Skemer says the breadth of the library's collections in early American history owes much to donations from Princeton alumni and their families past and present. The late Margaret Nuttle, mother of class of 1963 graduate Philip Nuttle, established the Barksdale-Dabney-Henry Fund to support RBSC's American history holdings. The exhibition also features items from collectors Sinclair Hamilton, class of 1906; André de Coppet, class of 1915; William Scheide, class of 1936; Lloyd Cotsen, class of 1950; Leonard Milberg, class of 1953; and Sidney Lapidus, class of 1959.

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